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The Take-a-Defector- Out-to-Lunch Bunch

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WASHINGTON, July 10 — A certain air of international cat-and-mouse surrounds a new enterprise set up here to help defectors from the Soviet bloc make the difficult transition to American life.

"It's just not something we want to address," said a spokesman for the Central Intelligence Agency.

"We don't have contact here with that organization," said a spokesman for the State Department, where deniability is a well-cultivated art.

Bit by bit, however, the facts surrounding the mysterious enterprise, the Jamestown Foundation, are coming out, showing once again how hard it can be even for private citizens to avoid unwanted publicity.

'Just Plain Friendship'

The existence of the foundation was reported recently in brief, sometimes cryptic press accounts.

According to a report the foundation filed last month, as required, with the Internal Revenue Service, Jamestown's main activity is assisting recent immigrants in adjusting to life in the United States. It provides financial assistance, language training, information on how to obtain housing and medical services, career counseling and "just plain friendship."

While there is no specific mention of the type of immigrants to be served, it is known that much of its initial work has been with Arkady N. Shevchenko, the former Under Secretary General of the United Nations who defected in 1978, and Zdzislaw Rurarz, a former Polish Ambassador to Japan who defected in 1981. Mr. Shevchenko is now described by one source as quite an accomplished "capitalist" who commands \$7,000 or more for lecture appearances and invests some of the proceeds in real estate.

The idea of the foundation is to fill a long-standing gap in resettlement of refugees from the Soviet bloc who, after debriefing, have most often been sent off to fend for themselves armed with little more than a handshake and perhaps a new identity.

"It's a shame we're needed, but we are," said William W. Geimer, a 46-year-old Washington lawyer who is president of the enterprise.

Fears of Reprisal

While most Americans would presumably regard this as something to be promoted, Jamestown's backers worry that the Soviet Union could find it an intolerable provocation, an encouragement to potential future defectors.

Mr. Geimer and other foundation officials refused at first to talk at all about Jamestown. But then came a one-paragraph press reference to an unnamed foundation saying it had

been set up with Government aid to help defectors, and Mr. Geimer finally agreed to explain a few things on the record.

"We have no connection whatever with the Government," he said flatly. "Private contributors set this up."

Mr. Geimer, who for several years has been active in helping defectors resettle in the United States, served in the mid-1970's as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for International Trade Policy and also worked in the Federal Energy Administration. He said the idea for the foundation was born last summer when Mr. Shevchenko joined him and some industrialist friends in attending a Chicago Cubs baseball game at Wrigley Field.

After Mr. Geimer and his friends had tried without much success to explain the American pastime to Mr. Shevchenko, the conversation turned to the major adjustment problems such immigrants face.

From Helene Curtis Industries

One of the businessmen, Gerald S. Gidwitz, the 77-year-old founder and chairman of Helene Curtis Industries Inc., asked what he might do to help. The result was the Jamestown Foundation, named for the early English settlement in Virginia. Mr. Gidwitz is a director and his son James G., chairman of the Chicago-based Continental Materials Corporation, is listed in the I.R.S. filing as a vice president.

Among the early contributors were Helene Curtis — a company spokesman said the Gidwitzes used the corporate channel, rather than personal funds, to encourage other institutions — and Coopers & Lybrand, the accounting firm that serves as the Helene Curtis auditor.

The staff of the Jamestown Foundation, which lists its office address as 1708 New Hampshire Avenue, consists of only a couple people but is augmented by 15 volunteers with various special skills, Mr. Geimer said. According to the I.R.S. filing, the foundation expects to aid four or five people a year, though this figure could presumably rise if circumstances permitted.

"We're looking for the really high-quality people," Mr. Geimer said, "who can make an intellectual contribution."